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No. 113.

THE SWEARING DRUNKARD SOLDIER CONVERTED.

Stephen Roberts was born in the year 1793, at Wickbury, near Fording Bridge, Hampshire, where he followed the laboring line until his twenty-fourth year. His parents gave him no learning, for he did not know the alphabet before his conversion. Being brought up in perfect ignorance of the ways of God, he neglected his own soul, and openly walked according to the course of this world, walking in the paths of vice with impunity, loving the creature, and neglecting the Creator, "God blessed for evermore."

He enlisted into the —— regiment on the 5th June, 1817, at Gloucester, and in the year 1818 he arrived at the Cape of Good Hope, where he gave himself up to all kinds of wickedness, and became a complete votary of the world, the flesh, and the devil, living truly without hope, and without God in the world. The prominent features of his character at this time were swearing and drunkenness; these were his besetting sins.

The oaths which issued from his profane lips were dreadful, and shocking to those not accustomed to such expressions. To every assertion he uttered, whether it were truth or falsehood, he generally affixed the sacred

name of God to confirm it. His mind being darkened, his heart hardened, and his soul alienated, instead of serving and obeying God, and paying the highest reverence to his sacred name, it was his constant practice and pleasure to blaspheme it and use it with levity. This evil result of his dissipated life was never more visible than when irritated, for he was very passionate; then a whole train of the most obscene imprecations would flow from his mouth; the violation of the third commandment was nothing to him.

Drunkenness was the other characteristic mark of his wicked life. It is said that he has been in this awful state three and four days successively, and that very frequently. I have heard himself say that once, when in this degraded state, he committed a heinous sin, a sin which he never after his conversion spoke of but with shame: he permitted himself to be laid out as a corpse, stretched on a cot, and carried round the barracks by his dissipated associates, while they played the dead march. In this abandoned state he lived until his twenty-ninth year, without any desire of reformation, though sometimes under great convictions, for he often said, that, in his sober moments, awful reflections would terrify his guilty soul, and that when any person died he would pass sentence on the individual, saying, if that person had lived a pious life his spirit now would have been happy in heaven. These convictions, though often drowned by sin, ended in his conversion, for when the appointed time of the Lord was come, the Eternal Spirit convinced him of his sin and danger, "to the praise of redeeming mercy."

To appearance, he was one of the last persons whose heart we could have expected would be changed, but that which is impossible with man is possible with

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God. Such is his divine will and mercy that he often passes by those who are apparently not far from the kingdom of God, and chooses some of the lowest and most debased, and makes them signal monuments of his free, unmerited grace, and of the sanctifying power of his blessed Spirit. Such was the display of his spontaneous love toward the subject of this narrative, for there was nothing in him which could possibly merit the divine favor, but the reverse. And the happy change must be solely ascribed to the "praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made him accepted in the Beloved."

He arrived in Bengal in 1822, and proceeded to Berhampore, where a religious society was formed, and, by the frequent solicitations of a pious soldier, Enoch Coleman, of the same company (who afterward became his comrade), he was prevailed on to attend the chapel. It was not in vain, for then, for the first time in his life, he bent the knee at the footstool of mercy, where the sunshine of grace beamed on his soul, and the rays of divine love softened his impenitent heart. The Spirit of God operated effectually to the regeneration of his heart, and filled him with most poignant sorrow for his complicated sins, the remembrance of which was grievous, and a burden intolerable for him to bear. Now the breath of prayer incessantly ascended from his weary and heavy-laden soul, his convictions were great and many, often has he been amazed at the infinite mercy, and long-suffering patience of Jehovah, exercised toward him in not plunging him into the horrors of the nethermost pit of perdition, he began to feel that it is a bitter and evil thing to sin against the Lord, and daily without intermission. He would with fervency invoke the God of mercy to forgive a rebel sinner,

through the invaluable atonement of the Saviour. His language was that of a man who saw himself condemned, and he continued a length of time under the awful apprehension of the wrath of God being ready to be poured out upon him. Thus he continued burdened, until, through the preaching of the word, he was drawn by a living faith to lay hold on Jesus, the sinner's hope, and received consolation in believing; "for being justified by faith he found peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." He applied to that fountain which is open for sin and uncleanness, and that precious blood which satisfies divine justice, appeases wrath, reconciles man to God, expiates guilt, and cleanseth from all sin. He felt the love of God, and his goodness in giving Christ to die for him; he experienced that love wherewith Christ loved him, and saw the willingness of God to save returning sinners. Now he could say of a truth, "It is a faithful saying, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," of whom he felt himself the chief. The language of his heart was:

"I the chief of sinners am,
But Jesus died for me."

In a short time he became a member of the Christian society, and continued a consistent and exemplary ornament to the same, reflecting the light of divine grace, which shone conspicuously through his life and conversation.

Sincerity from the commencement of his religious career unto the end shone with a resplendent lustre. It might have been truly said of him: "Behold an Israelite, indeed, in whom is no guile." All his actions were sincere and disinterested, springing from the pure fountain of a Saviour's love, and for the period of eleven

years in the sincerity of his heart he served God, and as soon as he began to serve God, he stood in the midst of the barrack-room, and decidedly told his former wicked companions that he would not associate with them any more. This promise by grace he kept. Often have they endeavored to lead him into sin, but their efforts were in vain; he kept the wise man's admonition in mind: "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not."

His spirit of piety was steady and persevering, he constantly pressed forward, and during the arduous expedition against the Burman Empire, in 1824, 1825, and part of 1826, where many were the trials, sufferings, and temptations he was called to endure, he, like a good soldier of the Cross, was enabled to overcome them, and while many around him drew back he continued firm and loyal, always watchful, both in season and out of season.

Repentance was also a prominent feature of his Christian character; all the essential ingredients of gospel repentance, such as conviction of sin, contrition for sin, confession of sin, and conversion *from* sin, were combined in his life; he daily bewailed the wanderings of his heart, and the evil propensities and infirmities of his fallen nature.

His faith, hope, and charity were of a purely gospel kind. His faith by times was exceedingly vivid, though frequently his hope was weak, still he retained that hope which maketh not ashamed, and that faith which purified his heart from the love of sin. He loved and respected the household of faith, and they who love most the image of Christ were his peculiar company; he was also liberal, according to his circumstances; he contributed to the Bible Society, and always gave his mite to every Christian purpose.

He regularly and punctually attended divine worship, and there poured out his soul's desire to him who hath said, "seek and ye shall find." Secret prayer was his delight, every means of grace was a Bethel to his soul, and he experienced with the poet, that

> "Prayer ardent opens heaven lets down a stream
> Of glory on the consecrated hour
> Of man in audience with the Deity."

He was an attentive reader of the Scripture. He daily read its sacred pages, and treasured its contents in his heart; he constantly aimed at practising its precepts and commands, knowing that Christ left us an example, that we should follow his steps. His other books were few, and, next to the Bible, Dr. Doddridge's Rise and Progress of Religion was his favorite; he often read it with delight, and endeavored to experience its contents. In conversation he was both simple and heavenly, he was in many respects a burning and a shining light in religion.

Soldiers frequently say that they cannot serve God, because they are surrounded with so many temptations and trials, but he not only served God in spirit and in truth, but he endeavored, and was enabled in sincerity to fulfil that Scripture: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

On the 3d July, 1833, he felt unwell, but could not account for it; he still attended his usual duties, and in the evening he read the 11th and 12th chapters of Mark, and went to prayer with a member of the society. After prayer he spoke freely and long upon the love of Jesus, and the bright prospects of the eternal world; but that night about twelve o'clock he was seized with

cholera, and was taken into the hospital. I visited him, and when he saw me, with his usual smile, he said, "my poor tabernacle is going." I replied, "fear not, soon your race will be finished, and a crown of glory awaits you." He pressed my hand as a token of the truth of what I asserted, for he could not speak at that moment, through the excessive pain of the disease. He lingered for a few hours, and at intervals called on his blessed Saviour, saying: "Come Lord Jesus; come Lord Jesus; have mercy on me. I feel very easy. Soon all my trials will be over." On the morning of 4th July, 1833, in the fortieth year of his age, his happy spirit, in the steadfast assurance of faith in Christ, and with a hope full of immortality, took its flight to that rest which remains for the people of God.

PUBLISHED BY THE SOUTH CAROLINA TRACT SOCIETY.

Printed by Evans & Cogswell, No. 3 Broad street, Charleston, S. C.

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